School Terrorism Action Plan

Background:

In light of the September 11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the Center for School Safety has been asked to identify a safety plan to protect students and employees of Kentucky schools in the event of subsequent attacks. Toward that end, the Clearinghouse has worked with the Federal Emergency Management Agency and Sidwell Friends Schools to customize a plan they developed for Kentucky use. Our thanks to Headmaster Ellis Turner for his assistance and willingness to allow us to modify their plan.

This Action Plan is based on written and oral information and recommendations received from Mr.Vic Mandrillo, Regional Coordinating Manager of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Office of National Preparedness. As Mr. Mandrillo made clear, responses to terrorist acts depend upon two key variables-- the nature of the act itself and the amount of warning time involved. This document presents options that a school might employ to protect its constituencies in sudden emergencies, as well as those involving some lead time. It outlines preemptive measures that could be taken to prepare for terrorist attacks and offers recommendations for future action.

Defense Against Various Types of Terrorist Attacks:

According to FEMA, weapons of mass destruction likely to be employed by terrorists fall into four basic categories: *Chemical, Biological, Nuclear and Conventional*. The following explains what can be done to protect students and employees should such attacks occur while school is in session.

Chemical-- Defense against chemical agents is generally limited for civilian populations. The non-military use of gas masks is impractical because such devices are not easy to use effectively and require training and regular practice. When time is short, the best immediate defense against a chemical attack would be to quickly call all children and adults into buildings and attempt to limit air from being drawn inside. This is accomplished, albeit imperfectly, by shutting off all HVAC systems (air handlers and window units) and closing all windows and doors. While buildings do offer filtration against such elements, the possibility of some portion of those inside becoming ill remains a definite reality. Basements should *not* be used when seeking protection against chemical agents because they may cause vapors to become trapped. Spaces at ground level are preferable. The question of whether to allow parents to pick up their children during a chemical attack is a difficult one. Opening and closing doors would allow for penetration of airborne substances. The consulting services of a physician will be maintained to assist decision-making in such a situation.

Evacuation of the campuses after a chemical attack is another possibility. Such a move would require a central administrative decision (see *Decision Making and Communication In Event of Attack* below) and reliable information on the point of release. It would also require a high degree of confidence that no more attacks were imminent. Such decisions would certainly have to be made quickly and take into account wind speed and direction. If, for example, it were known that a chemical agent was released 3 miles away and the winds were moving in the direction of the School at 3 mph, we would have one hour to successfully escape. This would have to be accomplished on foot, moving as rapidly as possible in a direction away from the source of the release.

Biological Weapons—Defense against biological attacks (e.g. anthrax, smallpox) is difficult at best. Awareness that such attacks have been launched is usually not possible for days or weeks. The first signs may emerge as primary care doctors and emergency room personnel notice a higher than usual incidence of various types of symptoms. Should such an attack be discovered while it is still in progress, schools should immediately shut down all HVAC systems. Buildings should be secured by having windows and doors closed as quickly as possible. In this case, immediate evacuation offers little or no advantage. Once pathogens have been released, their invisible damage is already occurring. It would be most logical to stay inside campus buildings and allow parents to pick up their children at their own discretion. Guidance from a previously identified physician or pediatrician would also be essential.

After a biological attack has occurred, school would have to be suspended until health service officials give clearance. This is due to the fact that some, although not all, biological agents such as smallpox are extremely contagious. Anthrax cannot be spread from person to person; rather, the danger is from inhalation of airborne spores. To the extent possible, decisions should be informed by knowledge of the particular agent that is released as obtained by ongoing communication with community emergency management personnel. Here again, a previously identified medical consultant would be relied upon for advice.

Nuclear Weapons—Defense against nuclear weapons is extremely limited and survival depends largely on distance from the point of detonation. If such a device were to explode within 4-5 miles of either campus, protection is not really possible. Even at a farther distance, radiation exposure still poses a threat. If time permits and if "earthquake valves" have been installed, it would generally make sense to move campus populations to specifically identified basement or lower level rooms (see *Evacuating, Securing and Seeking Shelter in Specific Campus Structures*). If this is not possible, the interior hallways of buildings are the best option. One must ensure, however, that classroom doors opening into the hallways are closed to minimize the danger of flying glass. In either case, persons should kneel on the ground in the classic "duck and cover" position to limit the amount of body area exposed to flying debris. All building systems should be shut down to avoid gas explosion. Flooding from water line breaks poses a less significant threat. If such an attack has occurred far enough away that fallout alone is the issue, students should be kept indoors and parents allowed to pick them up at their discretion.

Conventional Weapons—The danger from the blast effect of conventional weapons such as bombs and other forms of explosive devices presents similar challenges although with a higher rate of survivability. The same procedures outlined for nuclear weapons would be followed here. Seeking shelter in predetermined basement rooms or in hallways makes the most sense. Should the school campuses themselves be a target, off-campus evacuation would be desirable. Arrangements should be made with institutions (e.g. churches and community centers) away from school campuses, should these become danger zones. Use of school athletic playing fields as an evacuation point might also be appropriate under certain circumstances. Here, too, parents should be allowed to pick up children at school as their own judgment dictates.

Decision Making and Communication In Event of Attack:

Perhaps the first step in prudent decision-making in emergencies involves the securing of reliable information. It is important to be able to quickly separate rumor from reality. Contacts within your community's police and fire stations should be regularly maintained to enable school officials to be included in the communication loop when determining the precise nature of the crisis. Such persons could also be used to summon help to campus in the event of a localized attack. As mentioned earlier, a specific physician will be identified to confer with the School administration in case of a biological or chemical event. Upon receiving news of any attack, identified Incident Commander (see Emergency Management Guide protocol) will immediately make calls to these various sources of information for confirmation and updated information. A mobile police scanner is recommended for the Incident Commander.

Once the nature of a threat has been determined and all outside sources have been consulted, an appropriate course of action will be determined according to response plans identified and trained through the Emergency Management Guide Planning Process.

Once a response has been decided upon, the Incident Commander will need to instruct all persons in their buildings about the plan of action. This could probably be best accomplished through the use of PA systems. All school personnel will then move into place according to their training pertinent to the school's Emergency Management Guide Process.

Evacuating, Securing and Seeking Shelter in Specific Campus Structures:

There are numerous reasons why evacuation under a chemical, biological or nuclear threat seems ill advised. Even if the release of such agents was far removed, wind speed can increase and move substances rapidly in the direction of evacuees. Exposure is, of course, always possible for people walking out in the open. Further, the ability to move hundreds of people in an orderly fashion *on foot* must also be considered, as should the

possibility of subsequent attacks while an evacuation is in progress. The problem of where to go presents another difficulty.

Before any evacuation could be contemplated, the school should have already identified multiple institutions (with large basements or interior rooms) in disparate sections of the area within walking distance. Communicating location with parents is yet another challenge since we would not know to which site(s) we were evacuating until the nature of the crisis was determined. *It is essential that multiple locations be identified and a communication liaison and plan be put in place as part of the planning process* (see Emergency Management Guide).

As discussed above, the principal means of securing campus buildings consists of immediately closing all doors and windows and shutting off HVAC systems and window units. As part of the planning process, individuals should be assigned to oversee door and window closings and to assist in moving people along to the proscribed locations.

Should an evacuation be ordered, the method of achieving this should be included as part of the emergency management planning process.

Rev. 10-3-01